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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 001397

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKIC CONFERENCE IN BAKU PASSES WITH LIMITED
FANFARE

REF: A. BAKU 01362

[B](#). BAKU 01337

[C](#). BAKU 00386

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Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Joan Polaschik for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Ilham Aliyev, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus President Mehmet Ali Talat attended the eleventh Turkic conference in Baku on November 17-19. The conference's final statement called for enhanced cooperation -- including creating a secretariat for Turkic states -- while citing several important issues for individual Turkic states, including support for Azerbaijan's position on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Most local political commentators we spoke with suggested the summit's importance was confined to showcasing Pan-Turkic solidarity, although they were enthusiastic about the need for cooperation among Turkic states. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Baku hosted the eleventh Turkic conference November 17-19. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) President Mehmet Ali Talat were the most senior officials to participate on the conference, with each giving remarks on the opening day. According to local press, 500 delegates from over 30 countries were in attendance. Turkic countries have held approximately ten to twelve of these conferences, most recently the Turkic Heads of State conference in Antalya in November 2007. The conferences are occasionally held at the head of state level. (NOTE: The Presidents of Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan attended the Antalya-based conference.) During the Baku-based conference, President Aliyev stated that the next heads of state conference will be held in 2008 in Baku.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The conference ended with a final statement, incorporating a variety of issues that are important for different Turkic states. For example, the statement called upon other Turkic states to assist Azerbaijani efforts to educate the international community on Armenia's perceived record of terrorism and aggression, Turkey's EU membership bid, and the TRNC's efforts to end embargoes against it. The

statement also called upon Turkic states to create a secretariat to prepare for future Turkic heads of state

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summits.

Local Response Muted

14. (C) Local political analyst and opposition Musavat party official Gabil Huseynli characterized the conference as important because it publicly demonstrated Turkic solidarity in the face of Russia's desire to exert greater influence over these countries. When pressed Huseynli admitted there were no concrete results from the conference and that the primary purpose of the Turkic conferences generally are symbolic -- i.e. to showcase pan-Turkic solidarity. World Azerbaijanis Congress (WAC) President Tabrizi also told Iran Watcher that this year's summit was consistent with previous summits because it resulted in no major proclamations or policy shifts.

15. (C) Reflecting the GOAJ view, "pocket oppositionist" MP Sabir Rustamkhanly told us the conference was important because it was hosted in Baku and that increasingly, Turkic countries perceive a benefit in greater cooperation. Rustamkhanly also highlighted the creation of a secretariat and a Parliamentary Assembly as a positive step toward institutionalizing Turkic cooperation. (COMMENT: It is unclear when these two bodies will be created and if there will be any substance behind them. While the GOAJ has a penchant for creating an array of working groups, parliamentary assemblies, and other forums to reflect its broadening foreign policy, the majority of these institutions carry little weight beyond making proclamations on the front pages of GOAJ-controlled press.)

Comment

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16. (C) This most recent Turkic conference fits the broader pattern of pan-Turkic gatherings focusing on form over substance. Turkic states have undertaken at least ten of these conferences since the early 1990s, but there is little evidence to suggest these forums have substantively deepened ties among Turkic states.

17. (C) Despite these conferences' track record, several factors suggest the need to continue monitoring such forums. Azerbaijan's ties to other Turkic countries -- especially Turkey -- play very well in Azerbaijani society and the GOAJ perceives a strong domestic political interest in publicizing its build support for "pan-Turkic" causes, particularly with respect to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The conference also comes on the heels of Turkish President Abdullah Gul's November 6-8 visit to Baku (ref A), Azerbaijan's attempt to label the PKK a terrorist organization (ref B), and the March 2007 conference for Azerbaijani-Turkish diaspora organizations (ref C), which sought to energize diaspora groups to counter the political and economic weight of the Armenian diaspora. The Gul visit and the diaspora conference occur in the broader context of Azerbaijan demonstrating a more confident foreign policy that seeks to showcase Azerbaijan's role as a regional economic and political leader.

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